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ABSTRACT

This report, the second in the National Center for Early Development & Learning's (NCEDL) "Spotlight" series, is based on a summary of longitudinal results through kindergarten from the "Cost, Quality and Outcomes Study" by NCEDL. The study involved child care centers in four states and was conducted from 1993 to 1996. Researchers followed a group of children from the time they were 3 years old in preschool through the early elementary years. Data were collected on how the quality of child care experiences when the children were 3 affected their language, academic (mathematics and reading), and social skills through kindergarten. Researchers looked at two aspects of quality in the preschool year: observed classroom practices and teacher ratings of their relationship with each child. Key findings were: (1) over the 3-year period, child care quality affects children's development across the range of language, academic, and social skills; (2) the quality of child care matters for all children, with similar effects for children from a variety of backgrounds; and (3) these effects are long-term, lasting at least through kindergarten. The report includes a brief discussion of why the study was conducted and its policy implications. (EV)

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Quality Child Care

Quality Care Does Mean Better Child Outcomes

No. 2 in the NCEDL Spotlight Series

August 1998

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Quality Child Care

National Center for Early Development & Learning

Spotlight No. 2
Aug. 1998

Summary of longitudinal results through kindergarten from the Cost, Quality and Outcomes Study" by the National Center for Early Development & Learning. Authors: Dick Clifford, Ellen Peisner-Feinberg, Mary Culkin, Carollee Howes and Sharon Lynn Kagan. This study involved child care centers in four states and was conducted from 1993 to 1996.

Quality care does mean better child outcomes

Researchers followed a group of children from the time they were 3 years old in preschool through the early elementary years. Data were collected on how the quality of child care experiences when the children were 3 affected their language, academic (math and reading), and social skills through kindergarten. Researchers looked at two aspects of quality in the preschool year: observed classroom practices and teacher ratings of their relationship with each child.

Classroom quality:

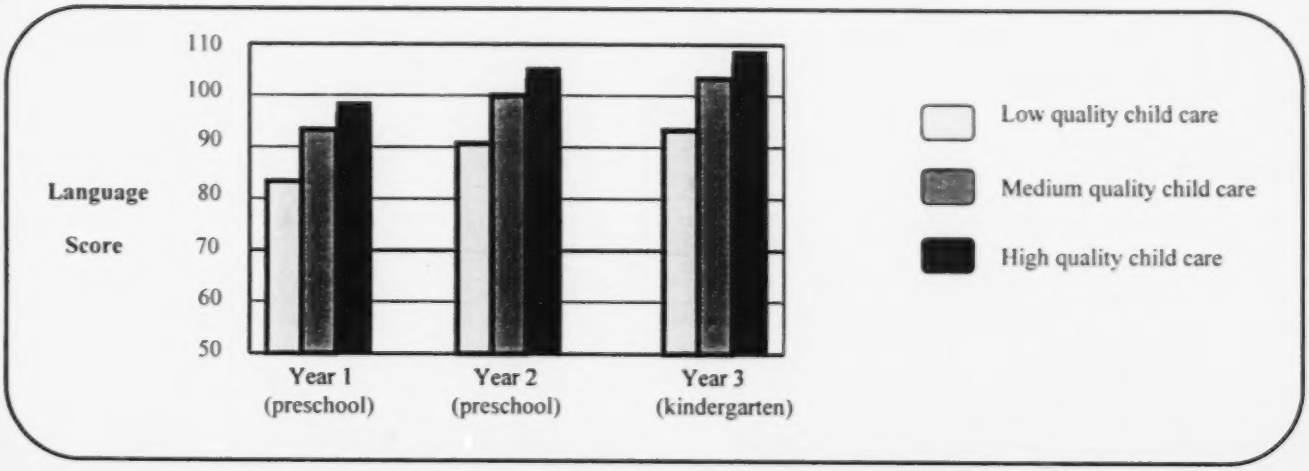
- Each year from preschool to kindergarten, children in preschool classrooms where higher quality practices were observed had better language skills than children in classrooms of lower quality.
- Children in classrooms with higher quality practices also had better math skills over this time.
- Children in higher quality classrooms also had better reading skills during the first year of preschool, but there were no differences in reading skills after that.

Teacher-child closeness

- Each year from preschool to kindergarten, children with closer relationships to their preschool teachers had better thinking/attention skills.
- Children with closer relationships to their teachers also were more sociable over this time.
- Children with closer relationships to their preschool teachers showed fewer problem behaviors -- this was especially true for boys. These children also had better language skills through kindergarten.

Key Findings

- **Over the 3-year period, child care quality affects children's development across the range of language, academic, and social skills.**
- **The quality of child care matters for all children, with similar effects for children from a variety of backgrounds.**
- **These effects are long term, lasting at least through kindergarten.**



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Why we did the study

Children's child care experiences are playing an increasingly important role in their lives. In the US, about one-third of three- and four-year-olds with working mothers attend child-care centers and this number is growing. Child care in the US has often been below the standards for high quality recommended by early childhood professionals. This leads to questions about the effects of such experiences on children's development. Our study explored how child care quality in preschool relates to children's language, academic, and social skill development through kindergarten.

How the study was conducted

A random sample of 401 child care centers in California, Colorado, Connecticut, and North Carolina, including about 100 from each state, was recruited and visited in the spring of 1993. The sample was limited to centers providing full-time and full-year care, and the sample included a wide variety of early childhood programs. For this study, a sub-sample of 170 of these centers was used. Participants included 826 children in year 1, 560 in year 2, and 448 in year 3.

Four different measures of quality were gathered in each classroom during children's next-to-last preschool year (3-year-old year), including the classroom environment, teacher sensitivity, child-centeredness, and teacher responsiveness. A second aspect of child care quality was measured by teacher ratings of how close their relationship was with each child. Child outcome measures were gathered in the spring of each year, for the last two years in preschool and kindergarten. Individual assessments of children's language, reading, and math skills were conducted. Teachers rated children's classroom behavior, including cognitive/attention skills, sociability, and problem behaviors. In addition, parents provided demographic information, including maternal education, ethnicity, and family income.

Policy implications

- **High quality child care can benefit a variety of skills, including language, academic (math and reading), social, and thinking/attention skills.**
- **High quality preschool experiences can help prepare children for school.**
- **The need for high quality child care is important for all children.**

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Peisner-Feinberg and Clifford are at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Culkin is at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, Howes is at the University of California-Los Angeles, and Kagan is at Yale University.

Data derived from the Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study, a comprehensive examination of child care costs, quality and effects on children through the early school years in four states. This project was funded by grants from the Carnegie Corp. of New York, the William T. Grant Foundation, the JFM Foundation, the A.L. Mailman Family Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, the USWEST Foundation, an anonymous foundation, and the Educational Research and Development Centers Program as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvements, PR/Award Number R307A60004, US Department of Education. Contents do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education, the Office of Education Research and Improvement, the US Department of Education, or any of the other sponsoring organizations. For more information, contact Loyd Little at 919-966-867 or email loyd_little@unc.edu. NCEDL is administratively based at UNC-Chapel Hill. This may be reprinted; we ask that you give credit to the author(s) and the National Center for Early Development & Learning.